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Results of Mission Work
in Mountains of N.C.

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Some Results of Mission Work in the Mountains of North Carolina



TWO MINISTERS AND THEIR WIVES.
(Mode of traveling where roads are too rough for wheels.)

By REV. R. P. SMITH, Superintendent of
Home Missions in Asheville Presbytery

“ Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife,
 Their sober wishes never learn’d to stray;
Along the cool sequester’d vale of life
 They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.”



A TYPICAL HOME OF THE REMOTE COVES

Introductory Note

Rev. R. P. Smith, the writer of this sketch, has been the Superintendent of the Home Mission work of Asheville Presbytery since the organization of that body, eight years ago. He was called to this work because of his peculiar fitness for it. From his boyhood he has known and loved the people of the mountains, and a large portion of his life as a minister of the gospel has been spent among them.

For the last eight years he has given his whole time to mission work in the mountains of Western North Carolina, traveling from place to place in conveyances of various sorts, on horseback or mule-back, with or without saddle, and frequently on foot. He has preached the gospel to the people in churches, school-houses and groves, by the wayside, and from house to house.

He has drawn plans and purchased the materials for our buildings, superintended their erection, and equipped them with furniture, and all this without embarrassing or jeopardizing the work with debt. He has organized churches and schools, and found suitable pastors and teachers to take charge of them.

He has been "all things to all men" and almost "all men to all things."

In this little pamphlet he "speaks that he knows and testifies that he has seen," and what he has written may be received by all who read it as an intelligent, truthful, and sympathetic account of the conditions found in large parts of this mountain country, and of the earnest and successful efforts that have been made, with meagre resources, to better these conditions.

R. F. CAMPBELL,

Chairman of Home Mission Committee of the Asheville Presbytery.

Asheville, N. C., Jan. 2, 1905.

Some Results of Mission Work in the Mountains of North Carolina

THE CONDITIONS.

The writer will now endeavor to comply with the numerous requests that have come asking him to publish an article on the Home Mission work in this part of our state.

In the past few years much has been written about the destitution found among the mountaineers of North Carolina. Many of the articles which have appeared in papers and magazines are timely and wise, while some of them are otherwise. Some writers have not discriminated between the cultured population of the valley sections and the illiterate classes that dwell in the remote coves and on the rugged mountain slopes. The demagogue politician and the self-important character of strong sectarian bias have used these unwise articles for strengthening the prejudices and inflaming the passions of the unlettered. In this way truth has been obscured for a time and the strong arm of philanthropy has been weakened.

After years of thorough investigation and close personal experience with all classes and conditions of those who dwell in this region, the writer must acknowledge that he has found much destitution in the remote districts; yes, more than most of us are willing to admit. In some respects we have been too sensitive on this subject, and have tried to mollify our sore by saying: "Other places are just as bad." We do not know so much about the conditions in other places; we certainly know that ours are alarming. Let the following facts speak for themselves:

- (1) In a certain mountain county there are 7,988 white children of school age, only 4,715 of these have been enrolled, leaving 3,273 that have never attended school. If

all these children would attend there are not enough school houses by fifteen to twenty to accommodate them.

(2) In another county 31 white voters of every 100 can not read and write. The census taker found 1,852 children of school age that have never attended any school.

(3) Many children are kept from school because their parents are not able to purchase the necessary books, sometimes not costing more than ten to fifty cents. This may seem incredible, but it is a true statement, for numbers of families in these remote districts do not handle as much as ten dollars in cash during an entire year. What they can not make at home they get by barter.

(4) We have visited many homes in which none of the inmates could read, and the Bible was not there because they could not read.

(5) Many of the public schools in the most remote districts are of little force due in a great measure to incompetent teachers, worthless, uncomfortable buildings, and short sessions of two to four months.

(6) Many of the cabins have only one room, in size about 16x18 feet; and it is used as kitchen, parlor, bed room, store room, etc. In such homes large families are reared; frequently we have seen from six to ten children in them.

(7) The women have to endure many hardships; they do the cooking, the washing, make the clothing, and then share equally with the men the work in the fields, making and gathering the crops.

(8) The scores of children born out of wedlock, the long dockets at our criminal courts, and the clank of the convict's chain testify in undeniable terms against us.

It is an unpleasant duty for me to record these facts; it is done, however, through sympathy for a people that have been long neglected. It has been well said: "They never had a fair chance." Entrenched here for generations and far removed from the thoroughfares of a progressive world, the wonder is that they have done so well.



A HEROINE AT THE PLOW

ENCOURAGEMENTS.

The mountaineers still maintain many noble traits of character bestowed on them by a noble ancestry. Independence is a marked characteristic.

Recently a man died, leaving a wife and five children, all girls, the oldest being twelve years of age. They had a little cabin on a small farm and there I found them struggling to keep the wolf from the door. While the mother remained in the house plying the needle and caring for the two younger children the older ones were in the field preparing the land for a crop; the oldest did the plowing. Not a murmuring word was heard as the struggle went bravely on, but an air of independence, which pervaded house and field, was an inspiration to the weary traveler. Reader, who would not feel like lending a helping hand to heroines like these?

It is very evident to all who have had experience with this people that they are endowed with strong intellectual powers. Often our teachers express great astonishment at the brightness of the children's minds. They readily undertake tasks which other children regard as very difficult. It is not an unusual thing for the younger members of the Sabbath schools to memorize a whole chapter of one of the Gospels for a recitation; and many of them master our Shorter Catechism within two to four weeks.

"If any man doubts the sharp intellectuality of the mountaineer, let him exercise his wits in trading with him, and he will come in contact with more shrewdness and penetration than he cares to combat."

Perhaps the most encouraging feature of the work is the eagerness manifested by most of the people for bettering their conditions. Concrete cases narrated would rival in interest many of our historical novels.

Some time since it was my privilege to spend a night with the leading character in one of the far-off mountain coves. He wrote the letters, read the papers, advised in matters of law, expounded the scriptures, etc., for the community. In the course of conversation he said: "Mr., you

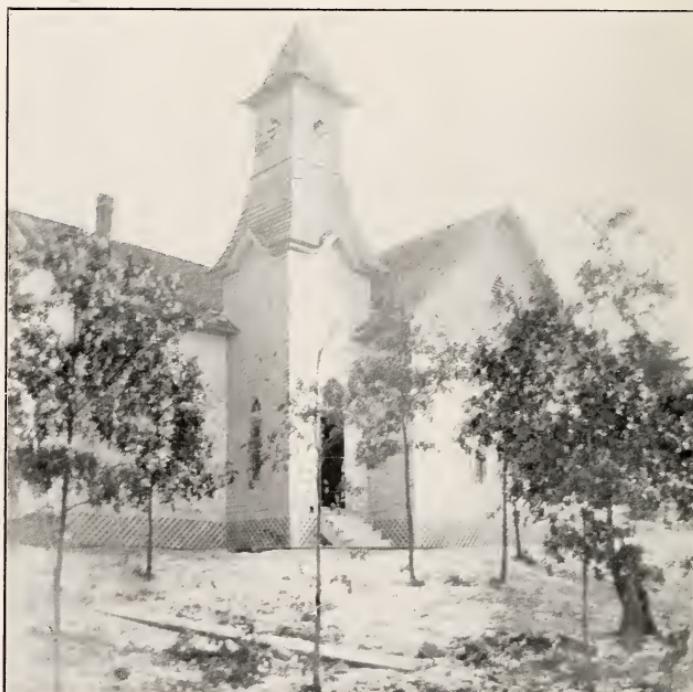
seem to be a knowing sort of man and I want you to explain a certain verse in the Bible for me if you can. I was reading the Bible to my neighbors the other day when I struck a verse that got me. It says: 'No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and the wine be spilled, and the bottles shall perish; but new wine must be put into new bottles.' One of the men said, 'There is something wrong about that; the old bottles at my house have been tried, and they will hold wine as well as any of your new ones.' I said, 'Boys, the Bible is right, but I can't explain it.' Then I told him that the bottles referred to in that passage were made of animal skins and not of glass. With a look of astonishment and much doubt he said: "Mr., where did you learn that, and how did you get it?" I explained how we get much information about the scriptures from studying the manners and customs of the people in Bible lands, and asked him if he had a Bible dictionary; he said that he had never heard of such a thing. I gave him one and showed him how to use it. An expression of great delight was on his face when he said, "Thank you, I'll be ready for the boys now." Sabbath after Sabbath he has explained in his own simple way the Word of Life to those who can not read. This might be called a Mountain Theological Seminary, if you please, and its library cost \$1.25.

SHORT SKETCHES OF SOME MISSION FIELDS.

I.

Seven years ago we entered Graham county to study the conditions there. But little investigation was made before we discovered the paramount need, viz.: school privileges.

The few public schools were sadly deficient, lacking in suitable buildings and competent teachers; the click of a



ROBBINSVILLE ACADEMY
(CHURCH AND SCHOOL BUILDING)
Robbinsville, N. C.

printing press had never been heard in its borders; apathy, like a gloomy cloud, had settled over most of the homes. The best of the people eagerly grasped the first opportunity that was presented for establishing a good school in their midst. The next year, under the leadership of a godly cultured woman, a school was organized at Robbinsville, the county seat, and a neat comfortable building was erected; one room being used for the school, the other for church services. The school has grown steadily year by year, and two more rooms have been added to accommodate the increasing patronage. The enrollment of students has reached 350, three teachers are actively engaged, a library of 600 volumes has been installed, a church and a Sabbath school organized, and a pastor employed.

The people of the community have helped liberally with this enterprise and refer to this school as the greatest influence for good that has ever been established in that county.

II.

A few years since a visit made in the northern part of Haywood county revealed the fact that there had not been a school of any kind taught within the bounds of a certain school district for two years. They did not have a school house, so the school committee-men during this time had been saving the pittance allotted from the public fund that they might use it for the purpose of erecting a building. In the meantime scores of children were growing up without any educational advantages. Many of the best citizens in that section pleaded earnestly with us to give them aid. Some benevolent persons became interested in their case, and soon a nice little building for school and church purposes was erected, bearing the name, Snyder Memorial Academy. Later a teachers' home was built, an efficient consecrated man was placed in charge of the work, 295 pupils have been enrolled, several young persons have been stimulated to seek a college education, a nice library estab-



THE SNYDER MEMORIAL ACADEMY
Palm, N. C.

lished, and the entire community is enjoying a great uplift in all matters that tend to make life happier and better.

III.

In November, 1897, mission work was commenced for the first time by our church on the head waters of Big Ivy Creek, in the Black Mountains. The needs were great and the difficulties that faced us towered in gigantic proportions like the rugged peaks of Mt. Mitchell, which have furnished a refuge for moonshiners and other lawless characters to these many years. Our entering that locality seemed to arouse all the evil spirits and a fierce contest was soon waging. Never did workers (preacher and teachers) labor more heroically than those on Big Ivy. The story written in full would give a picture so thrilling that it would tax the powers of the most credulous.

The good results have surpassed the hopes of even the most sanguine. Two churches have been organized, and the membership now numbers 150 souls; two good parochial schools have been established; two nice church buildings (with a school room attached to each) and a comfortable manse have been erected, the aggregate cost being \$2,500; intemperance has been checked; and respect for law has been inculcated.

Recently an ex-moonshiner told me that our workers out there had done more to benefit that section than all the laws of North Carolina had ever done.

IV.

While traveling in these remote districts often has my heart been moved in deepest sympathy for homeless orphan children, and for poor abandoned children whose condition is worse perhaps than that of the orphan. The writer found a homeless little boy who had been spending his nights in a stable using a bunch of hay for a bed; also, a little girl



THE COVENANTERS
(CHURCH AND SCHOOL BUILDING)
Dillingham, N. C.
(IN THE BLACK MOUNTAINS)



JENNIE SPEAR MEMORIAL
(CHURCH AND SCHOOL BUILDING)
Barnardsville, N. C.
(IN THE BLACK MOUNTAINS)

whose bed was a pile of straw where a vagabond mother had placed her. But let us draw a veil over this unpleasant picture. Effort after effort was made to secure places for these unfortunate ones in some of the orphanages of the state, but each time we failed; satisfactory reasons were given why they could not be admitted. Occasionally we succeeded in placing some of these children in good Christian homes, immediately a dozen more would make piteous appeals for like help. We could not turn a deaf ear to these cries. Through the aid of some kind friends we established a Home at Crabtree, in Haywood County, and it has been placed under the care and control of Asheville Presbytery. Many thought this a hazardous undertaking for the only definite pledges of help that we had came from two Ladies' Societies, which promised \$10 each per month. These amounts enabled us to secure the services of two noble Christian women; one does the teaching, the other acts as housekeeper.

The Home was opened January 19th, 1904, and since that time we have admitted and cared for ~~20~~ children. Thus far their support has come from individuals making voluntary gifts, and we have closed each month without any debts.

In connection with the orphanage a day school is conducted for the benefit of the poor children in the neighborhood, and 65 have been enrolled.

The work has only commenced. Scores of these poor children are appealing to us constantly for a home. Shall we reach out a helping hand and save them, or shall we let them drift away to swell the ranks of the criminal classes which bring shame and disgrace on our civilization?

V.

Recently work was commenced at Canton, a beautiful little village in the Pigeon River valley. A neat, modern school building has been erected; it and the equipments



THE ORPHANS' HOME
Crabtree, N. C.



THE SCHOOL BUILDING AT THE ORPHANAGE
Crabtree, N. C.

have cost \$2,000. The more prosperous citizens of that community seeing the great need for a school of this kind have contributed liberally of their means to help the enterprise.

The Primary Department of the school was opened last September, and already 60 pupils have been enrolled; the higher departments will be opened within a few weeks. It is our aim to make this a high school, giving a cheap rate of tuition, where boys and girls in this part of the state can prepare for college, and where numbers of our young people can be thoroughly equipped for teaching the public schools.

The pressing need of this work at present is a suitable building for a boarding department.

Numbers of other communities are begging us to give them the privileges of the Gospel. With deep regret we have been compelled to say "no" to most of the appeals made recently, because we have not the means to employ more workers. How long must we behold the needs and not be able to help?

BRIEF SUMMARY OF WORK ACCOMPLISHED.

The following is a summary of what has been accomplished during the past eight years in eleven of our mountain counties:

- (1) Seventeen buildings, at an average cost of \$750, have been erected, and all of them are free from debt.
- (2) Six parochial schools have been established and maintained with good results.
- (3) Six churches have been organized, and twenty mission points established.
- (4) Our church membership has increased 58 per cent.
- (5) The contributions of the churches to pastors' salaries and benevolent causes have increased 300 per cent.



THE CANTON ACADEMY
Canton, N. C.
(IN THE PIGEON RIVER VALLEY)

(6) Twenty-four additional Sabbath schools have been organized in which 1,500 children and young people have been reached with religious instruction.

(7) Several small churches have developed into self-supporting groups; and others are making rapid strides in that direction.

(8) Many Bibles and other religious books have been distributed, giving information, cheer and comfort to numbers of families.

(9) A Home has been established to care for poor abandoned children and for orphans.

The above summary represents much labor, endurance, thought, anxiety, and self-sacrifice. The teachers and preachers who are doing this work are worthy of double honor; truly, they are "Enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." Reader, we must not let you enter the inner circle where we have seen these noble characters bearing patiently so many hardships; God knows all and that is enough.

"THE DOOR OF HOPE."

To elevate these people of pure Anglo-Saxon blood and make them a useful factor in church and state is a matter worthy of our very best efforts. This can be done only by giving special attention to the children and the young people. The school and the church must be planted side by side, the teacher and the minister of the gospel must fully co-operate, and those living under more favorable circumstances must lend a helping hand.

This "Land of the Sky" has many of God's best material gifts to man, and they are waiting development; the uneducated multitudes stand pleading for opportunities that will enable them to become progressive and useful citizens.

Great possibilities and rare opportunities lie before us, let us seize them now.

R. P. SMITH.

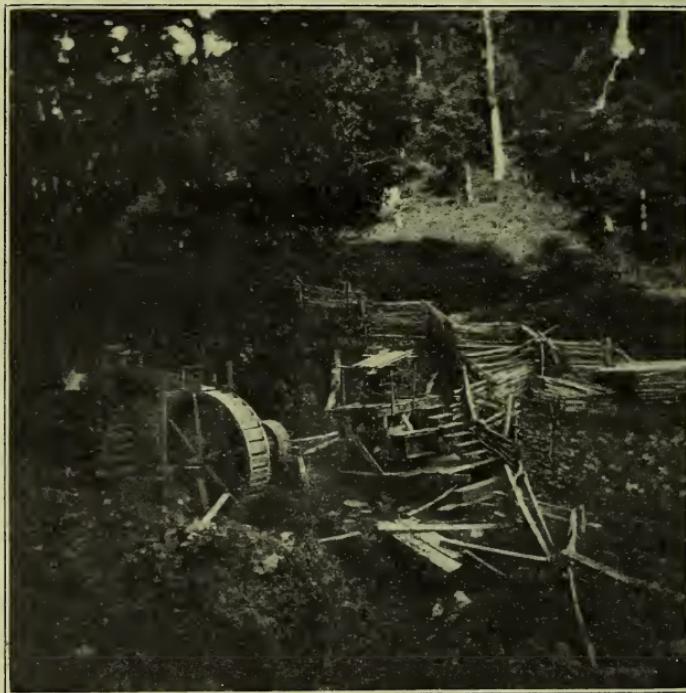
Asheville, N. C., January 2, 1905.

Extracts from Private Letters

The following extracts, from letters written by teachers in our Mission Sabbath Schools, were never intended for the public eye:

- (a) "Two very urgent requests have been sent to me for a minister to come and preach at_____. Could we not by some means raise money enough to have an arbor built and seated with plank, which could be used afterwards in building a school house?"
- (b) "I am compelled to combine a part of day school work with my Sunday school work. I am in great need of a reading chart, since so few of my children are able to read, and they have no books."
- (c) "I had to move my school out of doors as the room is too small to accommodate the crowd. How am I to get along without a house and without help with this school of young children, young boys and girls, middle aged men and women? They know nothing of order only under my eye. If possible do please put a gentleman teacher in this field for the need is urgent."
- (d) "In my Sunday school 40 children have memorized the Child's Catechism, and 21 have memorized the Shorter Catechism this year."
- (e) "Some children had to go home without their lessons being heard, so many I did not have time to reach them. They begged me to let them stay until dark if I could hear them recite."
- (f) "In a class of 16 young people only three can read. Do please help me with these poor people who are so anxious to learn."

R. P. S.



A CORN MILL IN A COVE

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